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ABSTRACT
        A reading theory which distinguishes between reading
as a passive recognition process and a cognitive participatory
activity requiring active interpretation is discussed in this
article. The method, considering reading as "thought and dialogue,"
stands in opposition to conditioned response theories basic to
audiolingual methodology. It is proposed that language instruction be
individualized to encourage students to develop their own cognitive
processes and intellectual capabilities. (RL)

Reading as Thought and Dialogue

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What if all the things that have been claimed for liberal education turned out to be true? What if even part of them turned out to be true? What if they were not only true but translated into practice? What difference would it make?

In the teaching of reading it would bring about a radical restructuring of prevalent classroom theory and practice.

It has been traditionally claimed, for example, that liberal education appeals to the mind, trains it, and makes it self-directing, but if we survey the materials available for teaching reading of foreign languages and sample the use of them in the classroom, we find an implicit assumption to the contrary. Most of them rely upon a teacher-centered decoding process: a text with marginal or footnote glosses plus an end vocabulary enables the student to decipher the text, and the teacher tells him whether or not his attempts are correct. Reading is in fact assumed to be a passive recognition process synonymous with word identification --- a student can read a page when he can identify all the words on the page and associate them with a referent. Memory thus becomes the chief tool in the learning process. There is usually little provision for vocabulary building except the memorization of the words deciphered, and discussion of the passage is based upon a questionnaire which asks the student to recall information given in the text. The whole class proceeds at the same pace because it depends on the teacher for the verification of meaning.

It is time for us to reappraise these commonly-held assumptions and to look at new strategies. If liberal education in general and foreign language teaching in particular have fallen upon evil days, it may be to some degree because they have abandoned the principles upon which they were predicated.

As a contribution to the discussion I would like to sketch out a cognitive approach to reading which might be described as "reading as thought and dialogue." It stands in opposition to the conditioned response theories that have undergirded much audio-lingual methodology. As "thought" it relies on and appeals to the intellectual processes much more than traditional methods. As "dialogue" it views the purpose and process of reading as the generation of new ideas and personal response. Because it is cognitive, it lends itself easily to a kind of individualized instruction which is presently being so widely discussed.

A cognitive view of reading first of all parts company with the idea that reading is a passive recognition process. It is more than an accumulation of vocabulary. It is more than word identification, for it always involves an active effort of interpretation.

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        As Frank Smith suggests in his recent book Understanding
Reading[1] it consists of "reducing uncertainty" by making things fit,
by sorting out unacceptable meanings. Moreover, the mind is always
active, not only organizing new sensory information but also leaping
ahead and anticipating what is coming next. The visual system is
in fact incapable, because of the neural bottle-neck of the short-
term memory, of getting information to the brain fast enough to ac-
count for reading if the brain itself is not conveying messages to
the senses telling them what to look for. Smith summarizes a cogni-
tive view of language as follows:

        "All perception is the result of a decision-making process
        that reflects past experience and future expectations as
        well as the information being received at the moment. A
        reader . . . extracts meaning from his environment (reduces
        his uncertainty) on the basis of the visual information (the
        surface structure of the language) and all the deep struc-
        ture of language and knowledge of the world at large that is
        within his brain . . . language could not be comprehended
        unless the reader made this critical contribution." (p. 69)

        It seems quite clear that something like this hppens in every-
one who learns to read. For example, the mind automatically gives
a different interpretation to the phrase "John walked" as the con-
text is changed from "in the evening" to "in the room" or to "in
the seventh inning." And in addition to interpreting familiar words,
the mind also uses the context of what is known to define what is
unknown. A student who has a recognition vocabulary of 20,000 words
has not gone to the dictionary 20,000 times. Rather, he has learned
many, perhaps most of his new words simply through the intellectual
processes of the mind working on context.

        If this is the way the mind really works the key to learning
to read a foreign language is to activate this potential as soon as
possible.

        It follows from this view that the general pedagogical problem
is that of getting from the initial stage of mediated reading to
non-mediated or immediate reading. This concept may be illustrated
by what economists call the "take-off point," i.e. that point at
which a developing economy ceases to be dependent on outside invest-
ment and becomes self-generating. In the initial stages of reading,
the establishing of meaning is mediated by the identification of
individual words which in turn are mediated by the teacher or the
format of the text. The "take-off point" is that point at which the
reader begins to use the text to define itself, at which he passes

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Frank Smith, Understanding Reading: A Psycholignuistic Analysis of
Reading and Learning to Read (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) 1971.

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from dependence on the teacher or format to dependence on his own
cognitive processes. It is the point at which he can; 1) recognize
the grammar signals of time, person, sequence, cause, conjunction,
etc. sufficiently to impose a configuration on his perceptions, and
2) associate enough words with referents to answer the question
"What's it about?"

Two tactical problems derive from this central concept: 1) how
to get the student to the take-off point as soon as possible, and
2) what to do once he is there.

The first step toward getting the student to the take-off
point is to establish linguistic priorities in the presentation of
the new language, for all words are not equally important or equally
hard to learn. The first priority should be given to structures and
function words, which are relatively few in number but high in fre-
quency (they account for 40-60% of the words on any given page of
prose) and which provide the means for contextual inference. An
example of the use of the grammatical signals is seen in the follow-
ing paragraph:

> The wind was flooping through the reegs of the trees. The
> night was sak and fleen. George umphed igishly and pulled
> his long heavy blug around the back of his hick. What the
> skwg was he doing here? Suddenly, a stort rang out, and a
> fleegul whumped to the earth with a heavy leem. Alas,
> George askaluked, I should have known better, what will
> poor Gwendolyn do now? [1]

Of the sixty-nine words in this paragraph, fourteen are completely
new, yet the general meaning is accessible to the reader who is
attentive to the context and the grammar signals. Until the student
can recognize the structures his "reading" cannot go beyond the
stage of word-for-word deciphering.

Closely allied to the priority given to structures and function
words is the way in which grammar is presented. Grammar presented
as rules to be memorized or as prescriptions to be followed often
becomes onerous or meaningless. Presented from the point of view of
function, as a tool of cognition, it can become stimulating and ex-
citing. This point was illustrated one day in a class of basic
reading for illiterate adults when one sixty year old man became so
excited he could not sit still. He had just learned that ay says
/e/ and that he could now identify thirty or more words that he had
not been able to recognize before. He also realized that there were
other regularities, other keys to opening up the world of reading,
and that he could learn them and use them. Instead of having one
more experience with failure, he had a new sense of adequacy and
power, which is part of the concept of "reading as thought." To see

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[1] -Sandberg and Schubert, Le Nouveau Passe-muraille (Appleton-
Century-Crofts), p. VI

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if grammar has been presented in this way, one need only ask a simple
test question: "What will the student answer if I ask him what he
can do now that he couldn't do before?"

Next, or perhaps parallel to the teaching of the structures
should come the acquisition of the most easily taught vocabulary, for
even though word identification is not synonymous with reading, it is
an indispensable part of reading and likewise provides the stuff or
context.

For this purpose content vocabulary items can be distinguished
by three characteristics, as being <u>cognate</u> (similar in <u>spelling</u> to
an English word) <u>familiar</u> (within the experience of the student) and
<u>tangible</u> (can be <u>shown by</u> a picture). They may then be placed into
one of eight categories for the Germanic and Romance languages:

1. Cognate, tangible, familiar, e.g. <u>table</u>
2. Cognate, non-tangible, familiar, e.g. <u>nation</u>
3. non-cognate, familiar, tangible, e.g. <u>chaise</u>
4. non-cognate, familiar, non-tangible, e.g. <u>mauvais</u>
5. cognate, non-familiar, tangible, e.g. <u>métope</u>
6. cognate, non-familiar, non-tangible, e.g. <u>monade</u>
7. non-cognate, non-familiar, tangible, e.g. <u>ficaire</u>
8. non-cognate, non-familiar, non-tangible, e.g. <u>sourcilleux</u>

The familiar cognate vocabulary is easily taught by getting the
student to see the patterns, analogies, or sound shifts between the
two languages. The new name for non-cognate, tangible, familiar
items can be taught rapidly by programmed exercises employing pic-
tures and either oral or written cues. If initial instructional
materials are built around the vocabulary of the first three cate-
gories, students can progress very rapidly toward the take-off point.
It follows that this approach places the initial emphasis on compre-
hension rather than on the equal and concomitant development of the
four skills.

A second step, especially with students who have had previous
acquaintance with the language is to have the student diagnose his
own deficiencies. At Macalester the first thing a student does at
the beginning of the intermediate course is to take a diagnostic
test and to establish his linguistic profile, in this case a catalo-
gue of structures that he does not recognize. He then makes out his
own syllabus for work with programmed materials dwelling on the re-
cognition of structures. He then works through his own difficulties
at the pace he himself has set. The teacher keeps himself informed
of the student's progress but devotes the class time to other acti-
vities. By individualizing this part of the course progress is
accelerated toward the second stage of reading.

As the student acquires the means of establishing context it is
important, as a part of the concept of dialogue, to get him to ask
questions of the text, e.g. simply "What's it about?" and "How do
things fit together?" This idea is closely related to another prin-
ciple: <u>train the student from the outset to look for the whole con-
text.</u>

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These ideas seem simple and yet the format of the traditional
reader leads, almost forces, the student to a word-by-word decipher-
ing which is not reading, i.e. the establishing of meaning. Most
teachers have a file of fractured translations made into English dur-
ing the exams. Take for example the phrase taken from the Daudet
story, "L'Elixir du révérend Père Gaucher," where Father Gaucher has
succumbed to the temptation of his own liqueur: "Il dégustait son
péché par petits coups": "He was disgusted with such a small fish."
"He loathed his sin." "His fowl fish was served in a small cup."
Such boners could come only from someone who had been allowed to fall
into the idea that language is simply individual words.

    In order to cope with this problem and to provide linguistic sup-
port without encouraging a word approach to reading, we developed a
semi-programmed format for second-year work. The selection is broken
down into paragraph length bits and the student is asked simply to
read the entire paragraph underlining unknown words. Following the
paragraph is a programmed analysis of the lexical and structural diff-
iculties which the student works through in 3-6 frames. He then re-reads
the paragraph. Almost invariably the difficulties are cleared up,
even those which are not programmed.   Whether this format or another
is used, it is hard to over-estimate the importance of getting the
learner to look for whole thoughts.

    Up to this point the cognitive aspects of the strategy I have
been describing are seen in the way the student approaches the text
and the learning process. The individualized aspect of the instruc-
tion has consisted of enabling the student to find out where he is
and to proceed as directly as possible to the goal of being able to
use context. The support he needs is given by diagnostic testing and
by programmed materials tailored to his particular needs. The control
previously provided by the teacher is shifted to the student's own
cognitive processes.

    When he reaches the take-off point the implementation of the
"thought and dialogue" concept is enlarged and the concept of "indiv-
idualized" instruction is modified.

    At this point the student should start to do extensive independ-
ent reading in his fields of interest. It should not necessarily be
intensive reading, but should familiarize him with the learned and
popular press of the new language. At the same time, in the class
room the concept of "dialogue" should be developed, not dialogue in
the sense of conversations to be memorized (which are ironically the
antithesis of dialogue) but in the sense of response and exchange of
reactions and ideas. The dialogue may be developed between student-
author, student - teacher and student - student.

    This view implies first that our courses should be endowed with
substantial intellectual content which evokes a response from the
reader, and readings should be chosen according to their ability to
strike a spark.

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    At this point we must also part company with the text format
which calls for a rehash of the content of the reading. Discussion
takes the form of agreement or disagreement and the reasons why
rather than of answering "What happened next?"

    "Reading as Thought" also implies training the student in tech-
niques of analysis. We see what we expect to see. Teach him to look
for the stylistic aspects of the text --- how does the author start,
how does he get from one point to another, etc. --- and reading be-
comes the basis for writing and expression, since it gives the student
both form and ideas.

    The role of the teacher thus changes. He is no longer there as
the purger of the linguistic stables, nor as drillmaster, nor as crit-
ic or judge. Without abdicating his role as leader, he gives up the
stance of superior - inferior, and in the Socratic tradition responds
to his interlocutors and helps them to see where their ideas lead.
The classroom ceases to be entirely the place where errors are correct-
ed and becomes instead the place where people talk about and express
what they have read.

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    In summary, I have been discussing a system of individualized
instruction which is flexible enough to meet the needs of each student
and is calculated to evoke a personal and intellectual response. The
role of materials programmed for self-instruction is limited but nec-
essary, for they alone can provide both the flexibility and support
to bring the student to the point where he can be self-directing. The
orientation of the entire foreign language sequence should be toward
the utilizing and developing of the cognitive processes or intellectual
capabilities of the students. Only in this way can foreign language
study contribute to the liberal education in which it is grounded.